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REMARKS

The application has been reviewed in light of the Office Action dated April 27, 2006. Claims 1-48 are pending. By this Amendment, claims 31 and 35 have been amended to clarify the claimed invention thereof. Accordingly, claims 1-48 are presented for reconsideration, with claims 1, 5, 9, 12, 15, 20, 23, 28, 31, 35 and 39 being in independent form.

Claims 1-48 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as purportedly obvious over U.S. Patent No. 6,665,425 to Sampath et al. in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,405,178 to Manchala et al.

Applicant has carefully considered the Examiner's comments and the cited art, and respectfully submits that independent claims 1, 5, 9, 12, 15, 20, 23, 28, 31, 35 and 39 are patentable over the cited art, for at least the following reasons.

This application relates to monitoring status of usage of consumables (for example, toner, ink, etc.) and monitoring maintenance components, in a communications terminal apparatus or image forming apparatus. Others have proposed automatically transmitting order for consumables or repair service to a service depot (that is, vendor or outside service provider), without allowing a manager of the equipment to inspect the equipment and decide whether such order is necessary. In some instances, the manager can easily make a minor adjustment of the equipment or refill the consumables from available supplies in stock in-house, without ordering additional supplies or repair service.

Applicant found that it is more practical to keep the manager in the loop for deciding whether to order supplies or repair service. Accordingly, this application is directed to improved techniques of maintaining a system, communication terminal apparatus or image forming apparatus, including notifying a manager who supervises the apparatus, using the registered electronic communications address of the manager, when a consumable product in the apparatus or system needs refill or when a maintenance component in the apparatus needs repair or

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replacement. Further, when the consumable product is replenished in the apparatus or repair of the maintenance component in the apparatus is completed, a report is transmitted to the manager using the registered electronic communications address of the manager. Each of independent claims 1, 5, 9, 12, 15, 20, 23, 28, 31, 35 and 39 addresses these features, as well as additional features. In addition, it is preferred that a notification that a consumable product in the apparatus or system needs refill or a maintenance component in the apparatus needs repair or replacement is sent to the manager along with other information that the manager can use to place an order, such as identification of the apparatus, specification of the consumable product, identification of the service depot (for example, the registered electronic communications address of the service depot--see claim 47), and/or an order form for sending to the service depot including the registered electronic communications address of the service depot to which the order form can be sent (see claim 48).

Sampath, as understood by Applicant, proposes techniques for automated diagnosis and remediation of a document processing system based on analysis of image quality.

As acknowledged in the Office Action, Sampath does not find teach or suggest (1) automatically detecting a status of usage of a consumable product used in the apparatus and supplied by a service depot, as provided by claims 1, 9, 15, 23, 31 and 39, and (2) automatically detecting an event indicative of a defect in a maintenance component being used in the apparatus, as provided by claims 5, 12, 20, 28, 35 and 39.

Further, although Sampath proposes that diagnosis of defects can be transmitted to the customer or customer service engineer, Sampath assumes that the customer or customer service engineer will perform the repair action (see Sampath, column 4, line 65 through column 5, line 2), and therefore Sampath neither teaches nor suggests that (a) when the consumable product is replenished in the apparatus or repair of the maintenance component in the apparatus is

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completed, a report is transmitted to the manager using the registered electronic communications address of the manager (although Sampath, column 5, lines 4-8, proposes that after remedial action is taken, a verification process is performed and the result is logged into a database), (b) the request sent to the manager includes the identification of the apparatus, the specification of the consumable product, and the identification of the service depot, or (c) the registered electronic communications address of the service depot, and/or an order form for sending to the service depot including the registered electronic communications address of the service depot to which the order form can be sent or included along with the request sent to the manager. None of the portions (Abstract, column 4, line 11 through column 5, line 8, column 6, lines 15-50 and column 7, line 50 through column 8, line 51) of Sampath cited in the Office Action discloses or suggests (a)-(c) above.

Manchala, as understood by Applicant, proposes an automated electronic purchasing system. In the system proposed by Manchala, a system administrator specifies constraints which the system follows to purchase consumables automatically when the need arises. The system administrator may also specify selected consumables that will be ordered manually by a person without benefit of an electronic commerce system. Thus, Manchala assumes that when the administrator is notified, he/she will manually perform the remedial action and no further report to the administrator will be needed.

Although Manchala proposes automatic monitoring of the amount of consumables in printing systems, Manchala, like Sampath, does not teach or suggest, however, that (a) when the consumable product is replenished in the apparatus or repair of the maintenance component in the apparatus is completed, a report is transmitted to the manager using the registered electronic communications address of the manager, as provided by independent claims 1, 5, 9, 12, 15, 20, 23, 28, 31, 35 and 39, (b) the request sent to the manager includes the identification of the

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apparatus, the specification of the consumable product, and the identification of the service depot, as provided by independent claims 1, 5, 9, 12, 15, 20, 23, 28, 31, 35 and 39, or (c) the registered electronic communications address of the service depot (claim 47) and/or an order form for sending to the service depot including the registered electronic communications address of the service depot to which the order form can be sent or included along with the request sent to the manager (claim 48).


Since both Sampath and Manchala fails to disclose or suggest at least these features of the claimed invention, they, even in combination, do not render the claimed invention unpatentable.

In view of the amendments to the claims and remarks hereinabove, Applicant submits that the application is now in condition for allowance. Accordingly, Applicant earnestly solicits the allowance of the application.

If a petition for an extension of time is required to make this response timely, this paper should be considered to be such a petition. The Patent Office is hereby authorized to charge any fees that may be required in connection with this amendment and to credit any overpayment to our Deposit Account No. 03-3125.

If a telephone interview could advance the prosecution of this application, the Examiner is respectfully requested to call the undersigned attorney.

Respectfully submitted,


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